

# No teddy bears' picnic

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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Lucifer has a lot to answer for. He's the arch nemesis of dozens of Amiga game heroes under various guises and monikers. In Zeus Software's 'Risky Woods' published by EA in 1992 he's known as 'Draxos', this time preoccupied with relentlessly tormenting the residents of ...umm, Somewheresville.



Local monks have been diligently preserving peace and harmony of said placeholder location for a vague number of years until the horned harbinger of doom shows up to petrify them to stony immobility. Unleashing an army of unholy proselytes on the subjugated populace for unspecified reasons, Draxos intends to... oh, I don't know, only the German version of the manual is available and I can't be bothered translating it. It would only amount to gibberish anyway. The Mega Drive version is out there (titled 'Jashin Draxos' in Japanese). That'll have to do. It's not exactly War and Peace in any case so we'll muddle through.

We play a kind of cute-ified adolescent interpretation of Rambo known as Rohan, who for whatever reason doesn't appreciate the evil magician's leadership style, so intends to dethrone him ASAP. I think he can be an evil magician as well

as Satan can't he? They're not mutually exclusive, unless I've misinterpreted the whole situation. Never mind, it's not important.



It's our duty to track down the stone-statue monks and break them free with whatever weapon we have to hand. Bursting out of their concrete tomb-suits like Elvis jettisoned with rocket fuel they slyly detonate a smart bomb before dropping off stage, clearing the screen of any menacing miscreants once beyond range of the blast radius.



Secure both halves of the 'eye key' and we can then unlock the ocular-themed portal to the next area of the map, stock up our arsenal, and take on Draxos' first guardian zealot.



Killing anything that breathes somehow yields spinning gold coins that can be exchanged in 'ye olde shoppes' for weapon upgrades and energy replenishment. Naturally, everything on offer is set at extortionate prices so it pays to be a serial killer. In contrast to our world where we'd spend the rest of our days strapped to a bed in a secure ward with electrodes taped to our temples while men in white coats poke and prod us to find out what makes us tick.



Other weapons can be acquired by ransacking chests, saving us the bother of all that inconvenient genocide malarkey.

Whenever we take a hit ourselves some of these coins are shaken loose from our pockets, yet can be gathered up once more as long as they land on solid ground. Substitute them for rings and we're practically playing Sonic. Without the speed, hedgehog, loop-de-loops, pinball springs, and all that jazz. Otherwise totally identical.

Possibly this was considered too close for comfort for SEGA gamers, resulting in a modified levelling up mechanic for the Mega Drive port. There Rohan collects silver discs instead; with their holey look they resemble piratey pieces of eight. Collecting these reinforces our armour, whereas new weapons are acquired upon destroying the gatekeepers (a substitute for eye gates, though still activated with keys). There are no shops present at all, helping to keep the action flowing. I'm not a big fan of going shopping in platform games so it's a welcome change for me.



Enemy onslaughts are utterly inexorable, that's the first thing we notice. They respawn incessantly when dispatched, forcing us to keep forging ahead at all times. It's by no means a game you'd want to play to relax unless being trapped in the midst of a zombie uprising is your idea of fun.

Undead skeletons and flying mutant anteaters don't quite fit the bill, although the effect is the same. It's a torrential downpour of death-dealing peril, making an unlimited weapon a necessity. Luckily that's exactly what we're provided with.



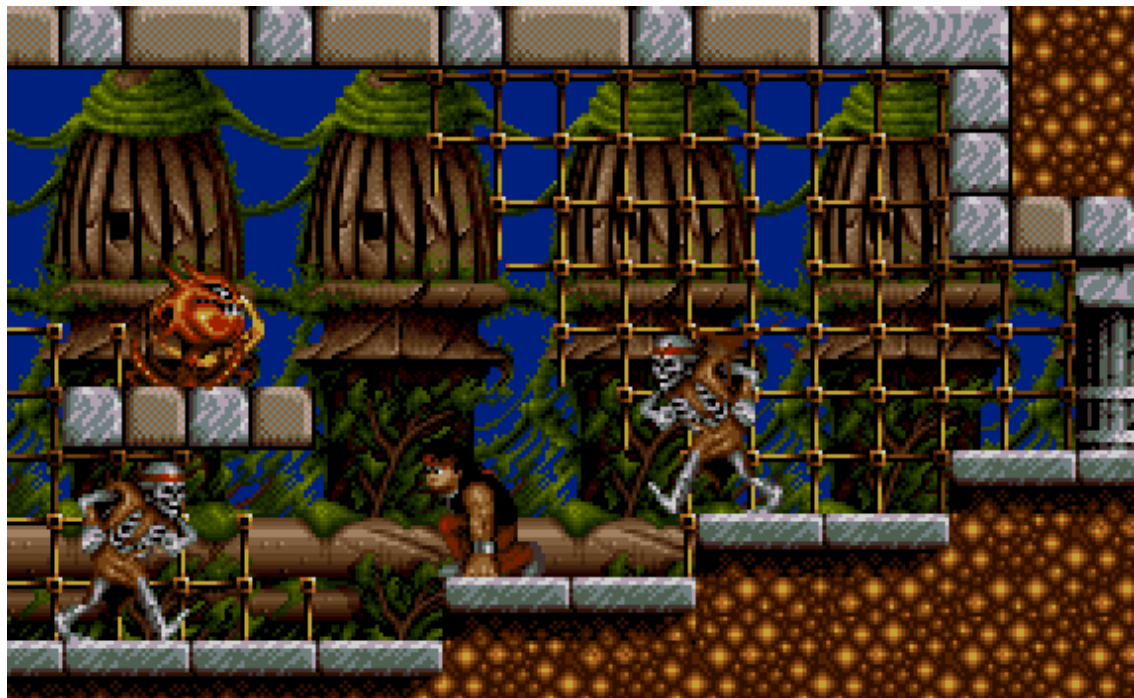
Rohan commences his quest with the weakest of these - throwing knives - trading them in later for plasma boomerangs, axes (useful for targeting airborne baddies), fireballs and morning stars. Each can be further bolstered by a power of two or three to enhance their effectiveness. Purchasing power-ups in the 'shoppe' takes care of that. Not *shop*, that would be silly.

Collectables are a mixture of useful power-ups and detrimental *anti*-power-ups. Apples, for instance, send us into a brief slumber while the gradient-copper-effect sky colour-cycles from blue to purple and back again. Out for the count momentarily, the egg timer depletes at an elevated rate, albeit increasing our energy. I'm not sure which is more useful, both are in critically short supply throughout.

Chevron icons are more clear cut. These if accidentally collected cause us to backtrack to a previous area of the level from which we must retrace our steps. On other occasions, we grab skulls and take an energy hit for our trouble.

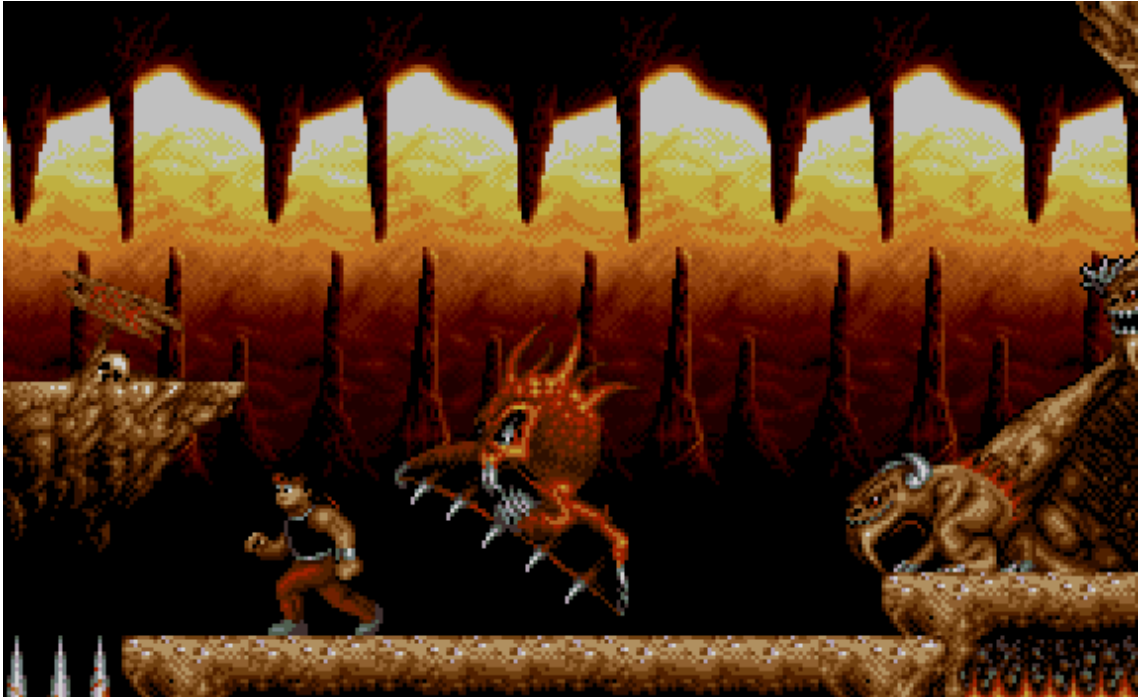


We *do* have to bend down and press fire to scoop up any of these items, making it slightly harder to select something unhealthy by accident.



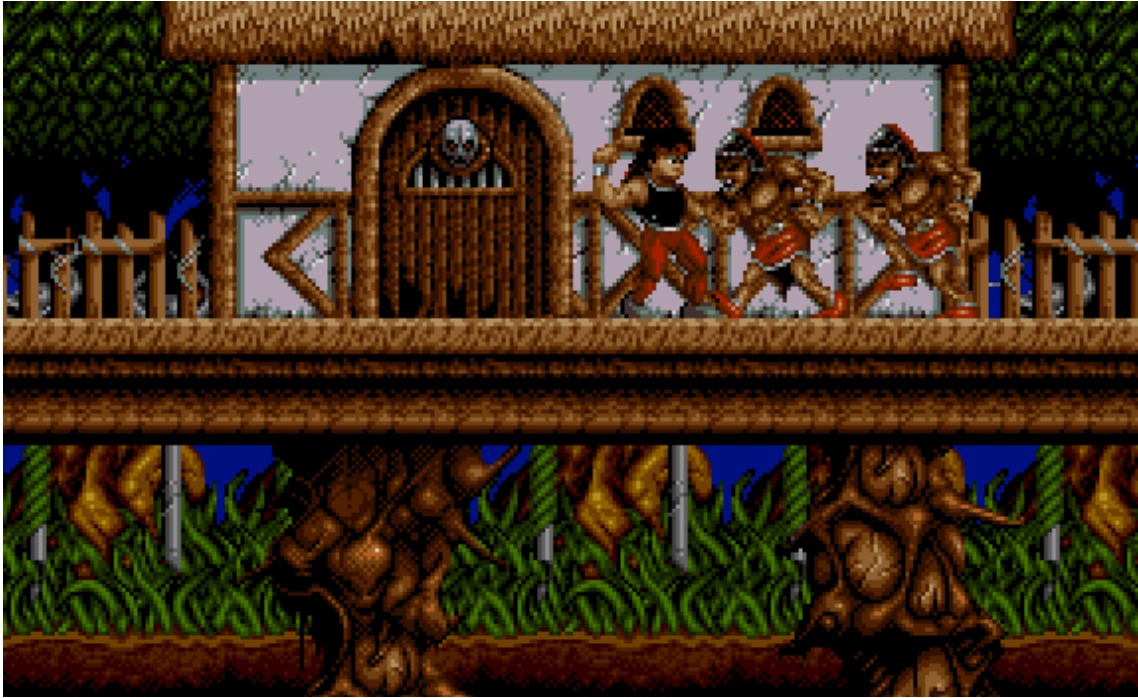
On the positive side, golden arrows teleport us to a safer area, egg timers boost our... well, that's obvious, while flying hearts or potions serve to top up our energy reserves. Furthermore, catching three mini Rohans equates to an extra life. No, really.





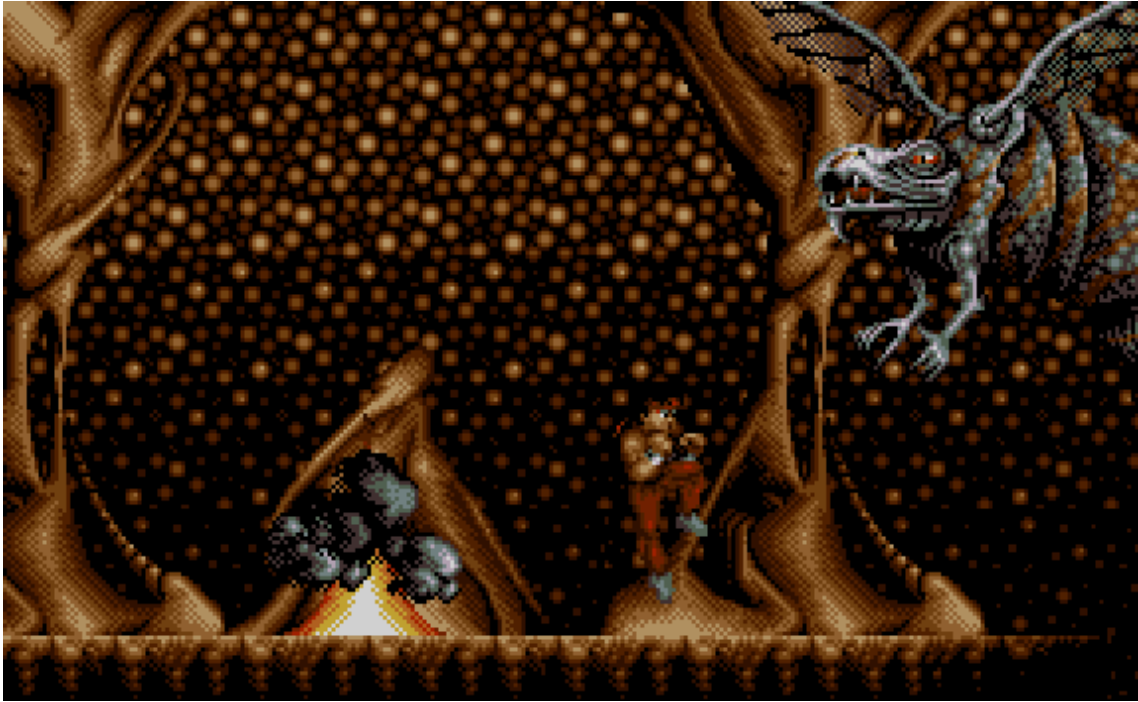
Twenty different enemy types plus bosses terrorise the eight landscapes (four zones each split in two), thoroughly putting our defences to the test. Many of these take the form of demonic harpies that look suspiciously like the red Arremers seen in *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*. Risky Woods has a familiar feel in general, especially where the pacing and crazy difficulty curve is concerned. Those three lives won't last long at this rate.

Then there are the humanish guards who would feel right at home in Monty Python's *Holy Grail*, what with leaning unnaturally into their run and moving in tandem like Siamese twins.



Unlike the mini minions, bosses are specifically referred to by name, making their slaughter much more personal. Strictly following '90s end of level boss protocol these are blinkin' gargantuan.

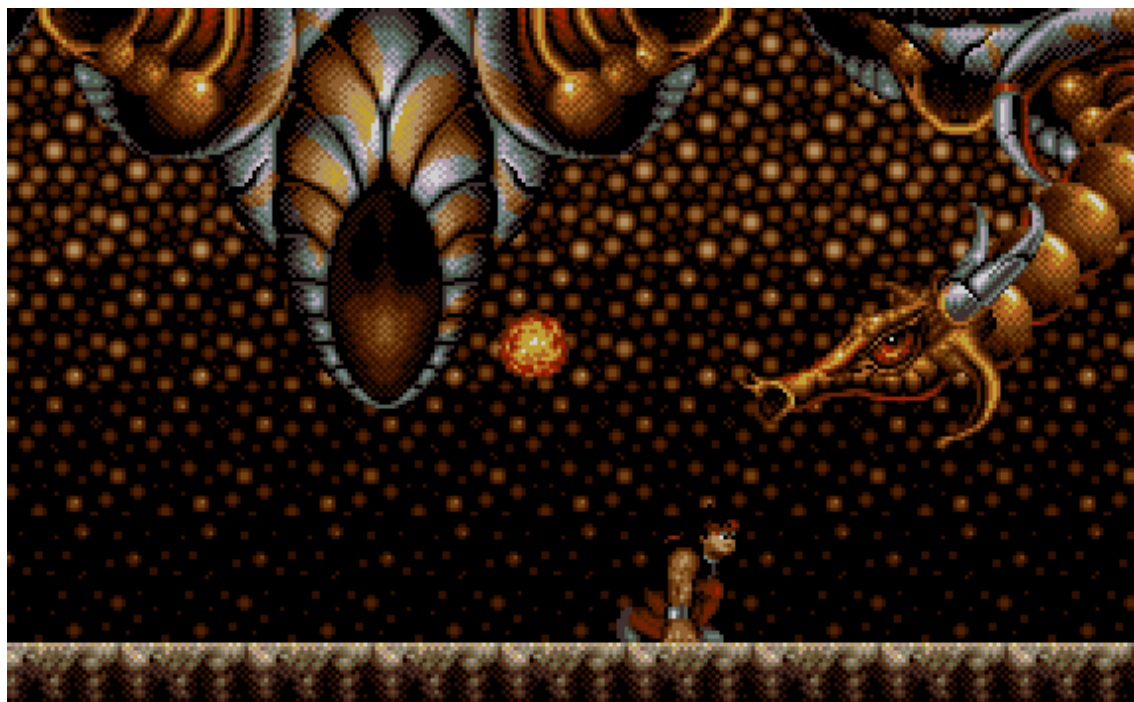
Zabrus appears to be some sort of buzzing mosquito-lizard hybrid.



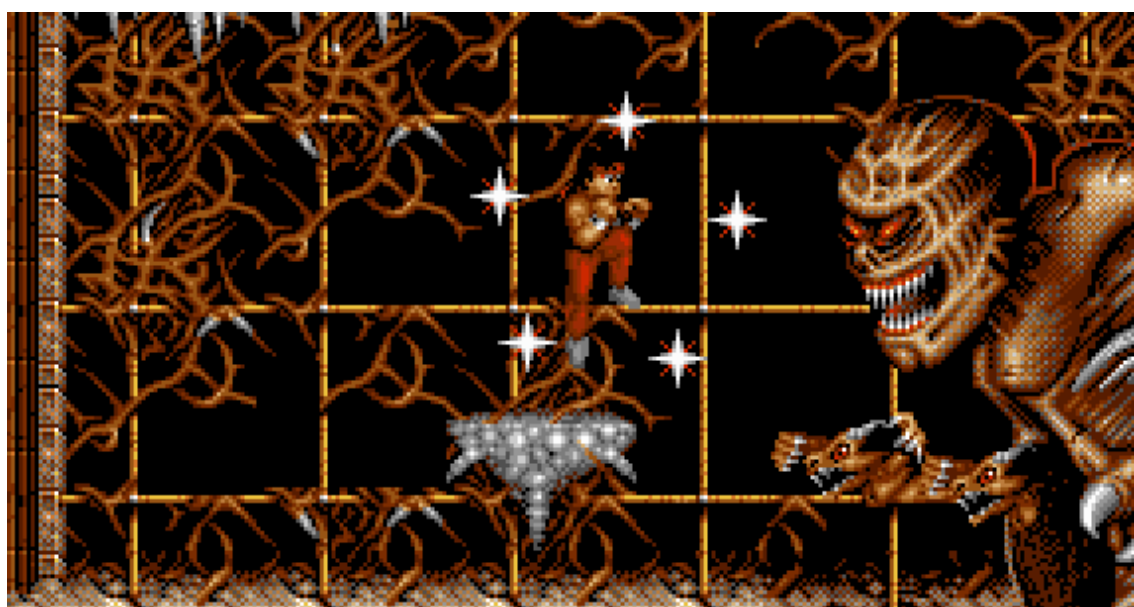
Ophios is a toothy flying bug equipped with orbiting, pulsating eggs. Upon hitting the ground these roll towards us revealing the nubile monsters within thanks to their diaphanous shells.



Too vast to occupy a single screen, Cephus is a proboscis-nosed, bull-faced creature armed with a jabbing, elongated, ball-jointed neck.



Ultimately we encounter Draxos, a freaky, razor-toothed, pig-snouted hellion who gives birth to flying stag demons via a kangaroo-like pouch.



Had I vanquished the rabid terror from the deep red yonder I'd expect to be rewarded with more than a minimally animated Rohan standing on top of a hill, punching the air in celebration (oh wait, that's the Mega Drive version). About 0.2% of the Amiga community would have seen this 'accolade' so why waste any more time polishing it, eh?



Zeus' time was put to much better use earlier in the game. Madrid-based Dinamic who subcontracted the development duties were known for backing or creating some beautiful looking games, though Risky Woods goes above and beyond their usual standard. So much so it actually broke new ground technologically speaking, as Codetapper discovered when he spoke to Risky Woods programmer, Ricardo Puerto.

Combining two slick graphical tricks that would be impressive in isolation, whenever we enter caves shadows are cast across our protagonist, toning down the brightness of his hues and hampering our visibility.



Amidst the murky gloom, portholes invite radiant sunshine to pour in, piercing the obscurity, illuminating our path. Through these colour-cycling vignettes we're reminded that there's a world beyond our own personal torture chamber... and there's something not quite right out there too.

Mounted on the cave walls are smouldering, flickering torches that don't really provide any additional light. They *do*, however, look very pretty dancing away in the eternally crepuscular dusk as demon bats circle above, biding their time to pounce.

Zeus made a decent attempt at formulating a concoction of Black Tiger and Ghouls 'n' Ghosts, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing, tightly controlling fantasy platformer escapade that's unfortunately so difficult it's no fun to play.



In gaming circles that's considered quite a major drawback. Still, EA arranged for the package to include a freebie LCD watch, so that's some consolation, isn't it? It's almost as if they were compensating for the lack of time granted in-game. If the hellspawn doesn't get you first, you can be certain the ticking clock will.

